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ABSTRACT

This report by the Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education proposes to restructure middle school education (grades 6, 7, and 8) in Virginia. The restructuring process has two components: the identification of Vanguard Schools and the development and implementation of a restructuring process in other schools. Schools that seek Vanguard School status will undergo a rigorous application and selection process. The restructuring process in other schools consists of identifying goals, putting goals into practice, and getting approval by district superintendents, local school boards, and ultimately the Virginia Department of Education. (JAM)

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Restructuring Education in The Middle School Grades

Adopted by the Virginia Board Of Education
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RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES

Restructuring takes rethinking. We will have to take our eyes off of the rearview mirror . . . and look carefully at the 21st Century. Then we may come to understand that the real curriculum of any school is that which makes a difference in the life of a learner 5, 10, or 25 years hence. (Ken Michaels, "Caution: Second-Wave Reform Taking Place", Educational Leadership 45, February, 1988).

The Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education recommended that steps be taken immediately to restructure education in the middle school grades. The middle school grades are 6-8. The goals of restructuring should be related to student outcomes. They should focus on positive self-esteem, on meaningful learning and achievement, and on successful transition to further education and productive adulthood.

Schools and school divisions may choose different ways to reach these goals. No single organizational pattern or set of instructional methods will be best for all schools. Copying the practices of successful schools in Virginia or elsewhere may or may not result in desired improvement. Each school and school division will have to look carefully at its own students and communities, at the best of current educational practice for the middle school grades, and at research. And in each school and school division, decisions must be made about the amount of restructuring that will be needed.

Extracting school practices from an entire school culture and replicating them elsewhere may make a bad school mediocre. To become a good middle school requires a change of vision about the possibilities of educating young adolescents. (Lipeitz, 1984, p. 200)

Restructuring the middle school grades should produce schools in which the professional staff clearly understands the developmental characteristics of the students, and uses that knowledge in curriculum design, in instruction, and in planning all of the school's activities. The leadership for restructuring education in the middle school grades should come from effective principals and from the participation of teachers in the important educational decisions which they will have to carry out. The expectation for students should be that all will learn effectively, will make gains in academic achievement, and will be helped by the school in their physical, social, and emotional development.

THE RESTRUCTURING PROCESS

The following is an overview of how the restructuring process will work. The restructuring process will have two components: the identification of Vanguard Schools and the development and implementation of a restructuring process in all other schools. The restructuring process will include all (approximately 898) schools which have grades 6, 7, or 8.

These schools will be divided into three groups. Group 1 will include all of those schools (149) which have all three grades 6, 7, and 8. Groups 2 and 3 (374 schools, 375 schools; total 749 schools) will include all other schools which have one or two of grades 6, 7, and 8.

Component I

In 1988-89, schools in Group 1 which are believed by their principals and division superintendents to be exceptionally successful in meeting the needs of their students may apply for selection as Vanguard Schools. Designation as a Vanguard School will involve both recognition of the school's accomplishments and an obligation to assist other schools in the restructuring process. Criteria will be developed based on goals found on page 6.

Also in 1988-89, materials and resources will be identified and prepared by the Department of Education to assist in the restructuring process.

In 1989-90, schools in Group 2 may apply for selection as Vanguard Schools. Schools in Group 3 may apply in 1990-91.

Component II

Beginning in 1989-90, Group 1 schools will develop, implement, and evaluate restructuring plans which will move them to use exemplary curriculum, instructional practices, and organizational arrangements for early adolescents. Schools in Groups 2 and 3 will begin this process in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

During the summer of 1989 a workshop for principals and key teachers from Group 1 schools will be held to prepare them to lead their schools through the restructuring process. Principals and teachers from schools in Groups 2 and 3 will attend the workshop in the summers of 1990 and 1991, respectively.

COMPONENT I

Vanguard Middle Schools

During 1988-89, Vanguard Schools will be identified from Group 1. Schools which are believed by their principals and division superintendents to be exceptionally successful in meeting the needs of their students, and already are substantially achieving the goals (see page 6) of good middle schools may apply to become a Vanguard Middle School.

Application Process

Schools seeking Vanguard status will undergo a rigorous application process. The application will include a description of current programs and accomplishments, documentation of student achievement and other outcomes, a profile of the principal which reflects his/her commitment and educational expertise, and a description of how the school has already substantially achieved the goals of restructuring. The application will include a statement of interest and intent from the division superintendent.

Selection

Selection of Vanguard Schools will be based on a review of materials submitted and an on-site visit by a selection team. The applications will be reviewed using criteria developed from the goals (see page 6) in the second component of restructuring, and from outcome measures such as students' achievement and attendance.

Schools which have submitted applications describing exemplary practices will be visited by an on-site review team. The team will verify the application and will seek other evidence that the school has been exceptionally successful in meeting its students' needs.

The Vanguard Schools will be selected based on the findings of the review team. These schools will be invited to join the Department of Education and one or more universities for a two-year period in a network having the following functions:

- a consortium for the development of curriculum and exemplary instructional practices which will be needed in Virginia's middle schools in the next century;

- demonstration sites for the best educational practices and promising innovation;
- sites for funded pilot projects for emerging instructional technology; and
- training sites for administrators and teachers from other schools which are in the process of restructuring.

Because of the documented accomplishment of these schools, they could be made exempt from certain accreditation standards or regulations of the Board of Education.

Materials, Resources, and Training

Concurrent with the selection of Vanguard Schools, the Department of Education will develop an information and support system based on research, best practices and emerging practices, and related to the learner, curriculum, effective teaching, instruction, school climate, and school organization. It will include print, video, interactive videodisc, teleconferencing, and a computer network. Existing materials will be augmented with materials developed by the Department of Education. Individuals will be identified in Virginia and nationally whose expertise can help schools in the restructuring process. On-site and televised training activities will also be available for principals and teachers.

The first training activity will be conducted for principals and a key teacher from each school in Group 1 in the summer of 1989. This training will provide orientation to the restructuring process and to indicators of quality middle school programs, and will assist in the planning and successful implementation of change.

COMPONENT II

During the 1989-90 school year, schools in Group 1 will develop plans for restructuring. Schools in Groups 2 and 3 will begin this process in 1990-91 and 1991-92, respectively. It is expected that the planning process will require several months of study, discussion, and writing. The teachers and principals should develop the school's restructuring plan with the involvement of central office staff, parents, students, and community representatives.

Study and Review

The first phase of the planning process should be a careful study and review by members of the faculty and others. Activities in this phase should include:

- study and review of the developmental characteristics of early adolescents as a foundation of the restructuring plan;
- identification of the needs and strengths of the faculty;
- study and review of the research on effective teaching and learning and on grouping practices;
- study and review of technology as an instructional and productivity tool, with special emphasis on uses for remediation and in meeting the needs of at-risk students and potential dropouts; and
- verification of the degree to which current practices in the school are meeting students' needs in keeping with research findings.

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Identification of Goals

After study and review, goals should be identified to serve as a basis for a total program design which addresses the comprehensive developmental characteristics and needs of early adolescents. These goals should address but may go beyond:

- positive school climate;
- high expectations by all staff members for all students to achieve;
- the need for each student to be known well and advised on a regular basis by an adult in the school;
- emphasis on students' doing rather than saying;
- emphasis on students' learning and working cooperatively;
- emphasis on concrete learning;
- emphasis on all students' mastery of basic skills and efficient study skills;
- emphasis on higher order thinking skills, to include critical and creative thinking and problem solving;
- emphasis on career assessment and on first-hand experience with those who work;
- emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of skills and knowledge;
- flexibility in scheduling and organizational structure;
- implementation of effective teaching practices based on research;
- use of technology as a productivity and instructional tool, with special emphasis on remediation and in meeting the needs of at-risk students and potential dropouts;
- appropriate transition from the elementary school, through the middle grades, and to the high school;
- an expanded assessment system for documentation of student achievement which includes more than the results of standardized achievement tests;
- involvement of parents in the process of education; and
- involvement of the school in the community, and the community in the school.

Putting Goals Into Practice

Goals serve as a framework for identifying actions that are to be put into practice. Care should be taken that actions planned are consistent with the developmental characteristics and needs of students. Actions should include, but may go beyond:

- school climate which will reflect the needs and strengths of students, teachers, parents, and community;
- identification of a core curriculum in which all students will participate (based on the Standards of Learning Objectives and Competency Based Vocational Education for Virginia Public Schools or their equivalent);
- modification of curriculum and changes in organization, policy, and instructional strategies;
- students' discovery and development, by doing, of interests, abilities, and choices related to their future education, careers, and lives;
- opportunities for students, by doing, to internalize and demonstrate responsibility, self-discipline, pride, teamwork, and enthusiasm (e.g., students building pride in their own accomplishments by mastering "tough" problems, skills, or concepts);
- increasing the success of students who are at risk, with special attention to potential dropouts;
- collaborative arrangements for staff involvement in decision making and problem solving;
- identification of school-wide needs and staff development activities;
- a schedule for implementation; and
- monitoring and ongoing evaluation of the restructuring process.

Review and Approval

The school's restructuring plan, approved by the division superintendent and the local school board, will be submitted to the Department of Education for review and approval. After the restructuring plan has been approved, implementation will begin, and will be followed by evaluation by internal and external evaluators.

Implementation Schedule

The time required for implementation of the plan will vary from school to school. All schools should complete the restructuring process within five years.

ROLE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Department of Education will receive and approve the restructuring plans. Also staff will assist and guide the restructuring process. Comprehensive services available from the Department of Education will include technical assistance from staff personnel and contracted consultants, teleconferences, regional workshops, summer middle school institutes, and a network of Vanguard Schools.

Department of Education support of and joint activities with the designated model middle school and the network of Vanguard Schools will assist other schools in the restructuring effort by providing working examples of exemplary practices and pilot projects for the development and evaluation of promising innovation.

APPENDICES

- A References
- B Restructuring Schedule
- C List of Schools

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National Association of Secondary School Principals, **An Agenda for Excellence at the Middle Level.** Reston, VA: NASSP, 1985.

Wiles, Jon and Joseph Bondi, **The Essential Middle School.** Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1981.

OTHER RESOURCES

Center for Early Adolescence, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Suite 223, Carr Mill Mall, Carrboro, NC 27510, (919) 966-1148.

Center for Research On Elementary and Middle Schools, The Johns Hopkins University, 3505 N. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21218, (301) 338-7570.

Center of Education for the Young Adolescent, 128 Doudna Hall, University of Wisconsin -- Platteville, 1 University Plaza, Platteville, WI 53818, (608) 342-1276.

Educational Research Service, 1800 North Kent Street, Arlington, VA 22209, (703) 243-2100.

National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091, (703) 860-0200.

National Middle School Association, 4807 Evanswood Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43229, (614) 263-8407.

National Resource Center for Middle Grades Education, College of Education, EDU 118, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620, (813) 974-2830.

RESTRUCTURING EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES

Groups	No. of Schools	Component I Vanguard School Selection	Component II Review/Goals/Action
Schools which contain all three grades 6-8.	149	1988-89	1989-94
Other schools which contain one or two of grades 6, 7, or 8.			
One-half of school divisions with these grade organizations on a voluntary basis.	374	1989-90	1990-95
Remaining half of school divisions.	375	1990-91	1991-96

**Information
Delivery
Formats
(example)**

	Computer Network		
	Teleconferencing		
	Interactive Videodisk		
	Videocassette		
	Print Material		
Middle Schools	Research Based	Best Practices	Emerging Practices
Learner			
Curriculum			
Effective Teaching			
Instruollon			
School Climate			
School Organization			

**Information and Support System
adapted from Maryland Model**

1987-88 VIRGINIA SCHOOLS WITH GRADES 6, 7, AND 8

LOW GRADE	HIGH GRADE	# OF SCHOOLS	GRADE 6 MEMBERSHIP	GRADE 7 MEMBERSHIP	GRADE 8 MEMBERSHIP	TOTAL GRADES 6, 7, 8
PK	6	2	103	0	0	103
PK	7	7	323	283	0	608
K	6	323	21,423	0	0	21,423
K	7	130	5,348	5,886	0	11,734
K	8	3	563	758	858	2,179
K	9	4	122	188	537	847
K	12	3	220	190	330	740
1	6	2	34	0	0	34
1	7	1	15	8	0	23
2	6	2	234	0	0	234
3	6	10	1,037	0	0	1,037
3	7	3	318	348	0	666
3	8	1	112	96	93	301
4	6	23	3,273	0	0	3,273
4	7	22	2,113	2,309	0	4,422
4	8	2	153	125	264	542
5	6	9	1,995	0	0	1,995
5	7	13	1,213	1,191	0	2,409
5	8	3	1,500	1,574	1,559	4,633
5	9	2	138	221	263	622
6	7	9	1,315	1,545	0	2,860
6	8	107	24,398	25,572	24,568	74,538
6	9	3	547	594	607	1,748
6	12	8	513	593	591	1,697
7	7	1	0	832	0	832
7	8	57	0	16,080	16,415	32,495
7	9	35	0	9,591	10,798	20,389
7	12	16	0	2,170	2,391	4,561
8	8	2	0	0	292	292
8	9	9	0	0	3,014	3,014
8	12	71	0	0	9,237	9,237
398			67,620	76,136	71,367	209,643